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TAGS: [SNAR](#) [CS](#) [PGOV](#)
SUBJECT: Embassy San Jose: December 2009 Merida Report

REF: STATE 114752; SAN JOSE 994; SAN JOSE 978

¶1. Per Ref A, Post submits the following report detailing Embassy San Jose's Merida activities for November and December 2009.

Issues for Washington

¶2. Post appreciates the support that we have received from NAS Mexico in their role as certifier of funds for all Merida Initiative-related support. However, if possible we would appreciate a set standard of service reaction time on the certification of funds from NAS Mexico. Response times have varied and sometimes have taken up to a week. Although it has not been a limiting factor yet, this potentially could add to our bureaucratic wait time to order equipment and arrange training.

¶3. Embassy San Jose does not have a fully-equipped Narcotics Affairs Section (NAS). Instead, we have a political officer who is double-hatted as a Narcotics Affairs Officer (NAO) with two locally engaged staff (LES). Handling a \$10 million+ budget for Merida is challenging, and without proper staffing, Post's ability to implement Merida in a timely manner is limited. Anticipating staffing issues, we requested an additional Pol/NAO officer in our FY2011 MSP. In the absence of a Pol/NAO officer, we will attempt to recruit an Eligible Family Member (EFM) to assist in staffing. Also, INL is currently working to hire a Personal Service Contractor (PSC) to assist us with our Merida maritime support.

¶4. The NAO and two LES dedicate an enormous amount of time to Merida. Combined with the number of reports that must be done (including International Narcotics Control and Strategy Report, End-Use Monitoring, Operational Plan, Mission Strategic Plan, Performance Plan and Report, Merida Monthly Reports, etc.) and the support that must be provided for visiting Merida evaluation teams (such as FBI fingerprint team, prison expert, communications expert, CBP border inspection team, etc.), the task of ordering police equipment for the various GOCR agencies takes a long time. We estimate that for each item that we order, a staff member spends

at least one hour of time to do the research, obtain quotes, verify the item is what the host nation requires, procure, receive, and finally do the donation document. This does not take into account the staff time that our General Services Office (GSO) and Budget and Finance Office (B&F) here and at NAS Mexico spend on each individual item. We currently have over 150 separate line items that Post is in the process of ordering for Merida equipment.

¶5. Post may be requesting an additional LES hire to help us accomplish our Merida tasks over the next 2-3 years. Although the political section has office space for an additional political officer/EFM and a maritime PSC in the Controlled Access Area, there is little room at Post for another LES in the unclassified portion of the Embassy.

Internal Developments

¶6. On December 14, President Oscar Arias highlighted some recent improved security developments in Costa Rica, possibly showing at least a short-term positive trend on various indices measuring criminal activity. For instance:

- The budget for the Ministry of Public Security has nearly doubled since 2006. In 2006, the budget was approximately \$111 million. For 2010, it will be approximately \$220 million.

- January to November crime statistic indicators comparing 2009 with 2008 show a slight decrease nation-wide, thanks to increased police presence on the streets and the Ministry's new "Community Policing" program. For example, in 2008, the total number of murders nation-wide from January to November was 396; in 2009 the number slightly dropped to 383. Additionally, the number of homicides in the violence-prone province of Limon has dropped from an average of two murders per week in 2008 to only three murders between July and November 2009. However, the dramatic decrease in Limon has been largely due to increased police operations there that will not be able to be maintained indefinitely. Post still assesses that, per Ref C, while Costa Rica is not as dangerous as the rest of Central America, it is not safe.

- The political campaigning season is in full stride with national elections taking place on February 7, 2010. In Costa Rica, in addition to a complete change of the executive branch, every seat in the Legislative Assembly will change as there are no consecutive terms here. While we assess that our law enforcement and security relationship with Costa Rica will remain dynamic no matter which of the major parties captures the presidency and the Assembly, there could be continuity issues that might delay implementation of cooperation projects such as Merida in 2010.

Implementation Activities

¶7. The following implementation activities took place in November and December 2009:

- Per Ref B, from November 2-13, Post coordinated Merida supported U.S. Marshal Service-provided prisoner transfer training. This expert team instructed 68 Costa Rican law enforcement officers on officer safety, defensive tactics, and prisoner handling techniques. At the end of the training, we donated over 70 pairs of prisoner restraint devices such as

hand-cuffs and leg-irons. The event received positive local media coverage.

-Also per Ref B, from November 4-6, Post arranged for two trainers from CSECO (Campbell/Harris Security Equipment Company) to teach 26 Costa Rican law enforcement officers to properly use the CT-30 drug detection kit. We conducted this training at the northern border with Nicaragua at Penas Blancas. At the end of the training, we donated six of these kits to the Costa Ricans; these kits should enable the GOCR to better detect drugs in hidden compartments of tractor trailers and shipping containers.

-All FMF-related maritime letters of agreement have been signed. Repair parts and engine-rebuild kits have been ordered for Costa Rica's three 82-foot patrol boats. We expect the first overhaul of 82-foot patrol boats to occur in March, 2010. Additionally, we have on order three USCG-approved SAFE boats via the FMF process; though we do not expect to receive them before the second quarter of CY2010.

-In November and December, we ordered approximately \$130,000 worth of police equipment, primarily for Costa Rica's Air Wing that included equipment such as advanced avionics for several aircraft as well as basic police equipment for their ground support units.

-ILEA: 10 Costa Ricans attended the ILEA course Personnel and Facility Security Course from 9-20 November.

-We meet as a Law Enforcement Group, which also serves as our Merida Initiative meeting group, every Monday. In November we met on November 9 and November 30. In December we met on December 7 and December 14.

Significant Merida Supported Host Nation Seizures

18. On December 8, the Costa Rican Drug Control Police (PCD), using equipment and training provided under the Merida Initiative, seized 256 kilograms (approximately 563 pounds) of cocaine at the Penas Blancas border (on the northern border with Nicaragua). The interdiction involved a 1998 Freightliner truck. An inspection of the tires of the tractor-trailer revealed approximately sixteen kilograms of cocaine in each tire (16 tires) for a total of approximately 256 kilograms of cocaine. This case was independently developed by PCD agents based on targeting indicators and random inspections of outbound commercial cargo.

The PCD agents utilized Merida-supplied CT-30 drug detection kits (which cost approximately \$17K each) that contain fiber optic inspection scopes, probes, density meters, etc. The CT-30 kit was provided to the PCD in November 2009, and PCD agents were trained in the use of the kit by representatives from the Embassy San Jose DEA Country Office and Narcotics Affairs Office.

The Month Ahead

19. Below are Post's planned activities for January:

-January 6: Quarterly Merida meeting between Embassy Merida representatives and GOCR law enforcement agencies that benefit from Merida Assistance. This meeting is in accordance with Merida Letter of Agreement requirements to have quarterly meetings with the host nation to review progress on Merida goals.

-ILEA: Seven Costa Ricans will attend the Law Enforcement Management Development Program at ILEA from January 18-February 26, 2010.

-Mid-January: We expect the new ambassador to arrive and will provide in-depth briefings on Merida Initiative and other counter-narcotics related activities.

-We plan to advertise an EFM position to assist the Pol/NAO officer in Merida-related management.

-Continue to place police equipment orders for Costa Rican law enforcement agencies.

-From February 16-26, 2010, a two person team from U.S. Customs and Border Protection will be travelling to Costa Rica as part of the Merida Initiative to assess Costa Rica's land borders and provide the GOCR with 10 additional CT-30 drug detection kits, as well as related training. The CBP visit will support the Penas Blancas border, as well as border points on the porous southern border region with Panama in the Paso Canoas area.
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